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Harlem Renaissance Theme of Two March Programs

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--The Harlem Renaissance, a flowering of African-American creativity in the arts during the 1920s, will be celebrated with two special events next month at Illinois Wesleyan University.

The Symposium--a program meshing discussions of art and literature during the Harlem Renaissance, as well as the history of the movement--will take place on March 8 (Thursday) at 4 p.m. in the Anderson Auditorium (C-101) of IWU's Center for Natural Sciences, 201 E. Beecher St. It will feature Pamela Muirhead, associate professor of English, and Paul Bushnell, professor of history. The Symposium is open to the public, free-of-charge.

Harlem Nite, a program that will take participants back to the swinging speakeasy days of the 1920s, will kickoff at 7 p.m. on March 9 (Friday) in the Main Lounge of IWU's Memorial Student Center, 104 E. University St. The event ends at midnight.

Harlem Nite will feature music of the "Roaring Twenties," including a live performance by a 15-member combo led by Sean Parsons, an IWU senior music major from Peru, Ill. Festivities also will include mock casino gambling (poker, roulette, craps, and blackjack), a poetry contest with a \$50 prize, and a dance program by Jill Scott, a Philadelphia jazz artist. It also will include swing dancing and re-enactment of a police raid on a casino. Organizers of Harlem Nite will be dressed in flapper costumes and tuxedos. Food and refreshments will be available. Harlem Nite is open to the public, free-of-charge.

The Symposium and Harlem Nite are sponsored by SAVVI--Sisters Actively Visualizing Vitality through Intellect--a group of 11 IWU women of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. SAVVI is a community and campus service group, which promotes sisterhood and scholarship. Amber Mason, an IWU sophomore majoring in international business from Dumfries, Va., is president of SAVVI.

"The Symposium will share with students information about the times related to the Harlem Renaissance, especially art, music and literature," said Princess Johnson, a junior majoring in international business from Detroit, Mich., who is a spokesperson for SAVVI.

The Harlem Renaissance, Johnson explained, took place at a time when African-Americans were forced to live in ghettos, but it also was a time characterized by a "rebirth of their self-esteem when businessmen and women started their own clubs for entertainment--clubs where African-Americans could gather to celebrate life.

"These clubs," Johnson added, "gave artists the opportunity to perform."

Among these clubs, according to Johnson, was Harlem's famed Cotton Club in New York City and performers of the era included Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Billie Holliday. The great African-American poet, Langston Hughes, was a literary icon of the Harlem Renaissance.

Johnson was inspired to help organize next month's events because of the success of a smaller but similar event, sponsored by Black Men in Action, that took place on campus when she was a freshman.

Johnson points out that the Symposium and Harlem Nite will follow a series of Black History Month activities in February. "These programs," she explained, "show that we can celebrate African-American culture outside of February."

The Symposium and Harlem Nite are funded by the IWU President's Office.

Johnson began helping to organize the twin events sponsored by SAVVI after returning from a semester in Spain last December. She studied at La Universidad de Complutense in Madrid. Her courses concentrated on Spanish literature, art history, foreign investment, and economic and political issues concerning the European Union, an organization of continental nations.

"I believe," Johnson said, "that very soon the European Union will move into a position to challenge the U.S. as the No. 1 superpower."

Johnson's semester abroad also helped her to sharpen her Spanish-language skills.